

REMARKS FOR 517TH COMBAT INFANTRY TEAM CONVENTION  
FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA

by LT GEN BOWEN, 15 AUGUST 1964

Lieutenant Sanford, ladies and gentlemen:

For the third time in the history of the 517th Parachute Combat Team, welcome to Fort Bragg.

I imagine some of you remember coming to Fort Bragg for the first time. You were new but full-fledged paratroopers then. Even Camp Mackall must have looked good after months of running up and down Currahee Mountain at Camp Toccoa--and after Fort Benning's pioneer jump school.

But it was worth it, for otherwise you may never have been selected to participate in the Tennessee Maneuvers--or to travel to Europe aboard the Grace liner Santa Rosa with only a few Air Corps crews as competition for those other distinguished passengers--two companies of the Women's Army Corps.

Now, I'm a Johnny-come-lately paratrooper, as some of you know. I came in at the corporate level, so to speak, as a brigadier general and so I'm not qualified to tell first-hand jump stories of World War II, as you are.

But, since becoming a member of the jumping fraternity almost ten years ago, I've made a point of delving into airborne history. I can even come up with some interesting facts about the 517th and its companion outfits, the 460th Parachute Field Artillery and the 596th Airborne Engineer Company.

It hasn't always been easy to trace the accomplishments of the 517th for isn't it true that outfits like the 82d Airborne Division and the 101st Airborne

Division were better manned with public information personnel, and therefore outperformed you in the public print?

But nobody can take from you the glory of your combat jump into Southern France. Stars and Stripes called it "Champagne Campaign"--but you know that a lot of blood flowed, too--some of ours, but mostly and fortunately that of the enemy.

The champagne didn't come until later in those weekends at Nice, where some of you also found charming French wives. Now on that latter subject I AM something of an expert because Mrs. Bowen is French also--and charming besides.

Even before your jump into Southern France, you fought with distinction in Tuscany with the 36th Division.

And, after Southern France, you became the most attached outfit in Europe, fighting as a fire brigade for the glory of the Third Armored Division, the 7th Armored Division, the 30th, 75th, 78th and 106th Infantry Divisions, and the 82d Airborne Division.

Then came your service with the lucky or unlucky 13th Airborne Division, depending on the way you look at all those missions which were aborted--like the jump across the Rhine which you never had to make--the jump south of Stuttgart, also called off--and that jump into Denmark, which VE Day made unnecessary.

It it hadn't been for the atom bomb, you might have got to jump in the Pacific. Instead, you returned to Fort Bragg--to march in that great parade in New York City--wearing 82d Airborne Division patches.

If that weren't bad enough, when they gave your personnel to the 505th Airborne Infantry Regiment, at the deactivation of the 13th Airborne Division, there were more of you there than there were 505ers.

So I guess you have a right to be known as the usually attached, frequently aborted, unhonored and unsung fire brigade of the European Theater of Operations.

But you've managed to produce a trio of general officers--Major General Louis A. Walsh, whom I wish could be here today--Brigadier General Dick Seitz--and Colonel Graves' ex-hatchetman, Brigadier General Zais.

And, of course, you produced a governor too. Knowing him well, as I do, I sometimes get the impression that Terry Sanford is as proud of his lieutenancy with the 517th as he is of the governorship of North Carolina. I know for sure that it wouldn't take much urging for him to buckle on a parachute and go with the green light again.

If you don't know North Carolina politics very well, I might pass on some information. The Governor was instrumental in getting you to come to Raleigh for your convention. Well, have as much fun there as you can, you won't embarrass him in the least. North Carolina law provides that the Governor cannot succeed himself--and Lieutenant Terry Sanford won't be on the ballot this November.

And have fun at Fort Bragg too. I am sincerely glad to see so many of you return for temporary attachment to XVIII Airborne Corps. It's a pleasure to note that many of you have brought your families with you.

The 82d Airborne Division has planned a demonstration I know you will enjoy. It won't be the same as the Old Airborne Army but remember--you of the 517th Parachute Combat Team, the 460th Parachute Field Artillery and the 596th Airborne Engineer Company are part of the great airborne tradition which we do our best to keep alive. If paratrooping seems a little easier these days, mark it up to progress.

Thank you for your interest in coming to Fort Bragg.

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